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EZ2:

USIA FOR AR/CENTAM; DEPT FOR S/LPD  
E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR  
TAGS: PHUM, PGOV, ES  
SUBJECT: OPERATION FENIX: WITH THE ARMY IN THE  
- CONFLICTIVE ZONE

1. (C - ENTIRE TEXT.)

2. SUMMARY

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AT ESAF INVITATION, EMBOFFS RECENTLY SPENT THE NIGHT OF  
JANUARY 31/FEBRUARY 1 AT THE FORWARD COMMAND POST OF

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OPERATION FENIX IN ORDER TO GATHER INFORMATION ON GUERRILLA ACCUSATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES AGAINST THE ARMY. NO SUCH EVIDENCE WAS FOUND. ESAF UNITS WERE FOUND AGGRESSIVELY PATROLLING THE NORTHERN ENVIRONS OF THE GUERRILLA REDOUBT OF GUAZAPA VOLCANO. MORALE WAS OBVIOUSLY HIGH. EVACUATED MASAS, THE MAJORITY OF WHOM HAVE NOW BEEN EITHER REUNITED WITH THEIR FAMILIES OR TURNED OVER TO THE ICRC, SEEMED IN GOOD SPIRITS. THE REAL VALUE OF FENIX WILL TURN ON WHETHER OR NOT THE ESAF RETAINS ITS ACTIVE PRESENCE IN THE AREA -- CAPITALIZING ON ITS DISRUPTION OF THE GUERRILLA INFRASTRUCTURE -- AFTER THE OPERATION WINDS DOWN OVER THE NEXT TWO WEEKS. END SUMMARY.

3. POLOFF AND A/ARMA WERE INVITED BY COL. LEOPOLDO HERNANDEZ, COMMANDER OF THE FIRST BRIGADE AND OF THE ONGOING OPERATION FENIX, TO SPEND THE NIGHT AT HIS COMMAND POST LOCATED JUST OFF THE NORTHERN TRONCAL AND SOME EIGHT KILOMETERS NORTHWEST OF GUAZAPA VOLCANO. HERNANDEZ' HEADQUARTERS WERE LOCATED AT A PICTURESQUE, ABANDONED 85-YEAR-OLD HACIENDA. ELECTRICITY WAS PROVIDED BY A GENERATOR, CAPTURED FROM THE GUERRILLAS, WHICH POWERED SEVERAL LIGHTBULBS, TACTICAL RADIOS AND A TELEVISION, AS WELL AS THE FIELD KITCHENS. THROUGHOUT THE EVENING, REPORTS WERE RECEIVED BY THE COMMAND POST PROVIDING FRIENDLY TROOP LOCATIONS ON THE VOLCANO, CONTACTS WITH THE ENEMY, AND REQUESTS FOR MEDICAL EVACUATIONS. A LARGE FIRE -- WIND-FED AND OUT OF CONTROL ACCORDING TO HERNANDEZ -- COULD BE SEEN RAGING ALONG THE ENTIRE NORTHWEST QUADRANT OF GUAZAPA AT NIGHT.

4. EMBOFFS WERE SHOWN MOUNDS OF CAPTURED DOCUMENTS INCLUDING PROPAGANDA ("DANGER, MINES; MAKE SURE YOUR OFFICERS GO FIRST"), GUERRILLAS' PERSONAL LETTERS, AND ADMINISTRATIVE WORK SCHEDULES FOR MASAS. ONE DOCUMENT DETAILED INFIRMITIES AMONG THE MASAS DURING LATE 1985 AND TREATED BY THE GUERRILLAS. JUDGING BY THE DIAGNOSES (ARTHRITIS AMONG 14-YEAR-OLDS, MALNUTRITION, GASTRITIS, MALARIA), LIFE ON GUAZAPA HAS BEEN QUITE UNCOMFORTABLE FOR THE GUERRILLAS AND THEIR MASAS. A CLOSE INSPECTION OF THE CAPTURED MEDICAL EQUIPMENT INDICATED IT HAD COME FROM THE GOES SOCIAL SECURITY HOSPITAL IN SAN SALVADOR. A DOCTOR'S NAME WAS ETCHED ON ONE STETHESCOPE. THE MAJORITY OF THE MEDICINES CAPTURED CAME FROM WEST GERMANY.

5. A GROUP OF ABOUT SEVEN MASAS WERE UNDER ARMY CARE AT SAN DIEGO. ONE CAMPESENO WORE NEW, LOW-CUT LEATHER BOOTS, WHICH HERNANDEZ DESCRIBED AS A TYPE PROVIDED MASAS BY THE GUERRILLAS. INDEED, THE NEW

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BOOTS SEEMED OUT OF KEEPING WITH THE OTHERWISE DECREPIT CLOTHING WORN BY THE MASAS. AFTER DINNER, EMBOFFS WERE DRIVEN TO THE NEARBY SAN FRANCISCO SUGAR REFINERY, WHERE NEARLY 300 MASAS HAD BEEN HELD. ONLY ABOUT 18 REMAINED BY JANUARY 31, THE REST HAVING BEEN TURNED OVER TO THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH. COL. HERNANDEZ TOLD EMBOFFS THE ICRC WAS NOT HAPPY AT HAVING TO ASSUME THE BURDEN OF CARING FOR THEM.

6. THE FOLLOWING MORNING (THE NIGHT HAVING PASSED UNEVENTFULLY), EMBOFFS ACCOMPANIED HERNANDEZ AND SEVERAL TROOPS ON A DRIVE FOR SOME KILOMETERS ON THE ROAD THAT LINKS AGUILARES AND THE NORTHERN TRONCAL WITH SUCHITOTO, ON THE CERRON GRANDE. THE UNPAVED ROAD, LONG CONTROLLED BY THE GUERRILLAS, HAD BEEN IN DISUSE FOR ABOUT SIX YEARS AND UNTIL RECENTLY WAS COMPLETELY BURIED IN UNDERGROWTH. THE ARMY HAD MOVED A CIVILIAN ROAD CONSTRUCTION TEAM INTO THE AREA WHICH HAD CLEARED ABOUT NINE KILOMETERS OF THE ROAD UP. THE ARMY EXPECTS TO REACH SUCHITOTO BY JANUARY 6. TROOPS OF THE ATLACATL BATTALION ARE MANNING STATIC DEFENSIVE POSITIONS ALONG THE ROAD TO SECURE IT. AS THE ARMY MOVES TOWARD SUCHITOTO, CAMPESINOS ARE FOLLOWING BEHIND, RECLAIMING THEIR LONG ABANDONED MILPAS. EMBOFFS SPOKE TO ONE OBVIOUSLY HAPPY CAMPESINO, BUSILY CLEARING HIS LAND, WHO SAID IT WAS THE FIRST TIME HE HAD SEEN HIS SMALL PROPERTY IN SIX YEARS.

7. COL. HERNANDEZ EXPLAINED THAT GUERRILLA ALLEGATIONS THAT SEVERAL CANTONS ALONG THE AGUILARES-SUCHITOTO CORRIDOR -- SPECIFICALLY, DELICIAS, EL PLANTANAR AND AGUACAYO -- AND OVER ONE THOUSAND PEOPLE WERE SURROUNDED AND "TERRORIZED" BY THE ARMY, WERE FALSE. HE TOLD EMBOFFS THAT TROOPS WERE IN FACT IN THE TOWNS, AND THAT THE GUERRILLAS AND MASAS HAD DEPARTED THE AREAS. HE CONSIDERED THE PEOPLE WHO REMAINED IN THE TOWNS TO BE FRIENDLY TOWARD THE GOES AND SAID THEY WERE BEING WELL TREATED. HERNANDEZ SAID THE INHABITANTS HAD MADE NO ALLEGATIONS OF GOES MISTREATMENT SINCE THE ARMY MOVED THERE. MORE LIKELY, HE SAID, THE FMLN WAS UPSET THAT IT HAD BEEN DENIED ACCESS TO AREAS IT HAS LONG CONSIDERED ITS OWN.

8. IN CELEBRATION OF THE BIRTHDAY FEBRUARY 1 OF DEPUTY ATLACATL COMMANDER, LTCOL. RENE MAJANO, THE PARTY ENJOYED A BRIEF BRUNCH OF WINE AND STRAWBERRY SHORTCAKE AT AN OBSERVATION POST LOCATED AT A BURNED-OUT HACIENDA. THE BUILDING, MARKED WITH FMLN GRAFITTI, WAS MANNED BY MAJANO AND SEVERAL OF HIS SOLDIERS. DURING THE CELEBRATION, MOST OF THE

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DISCUSSION CENTERED AROUND EXPRESSIONS OF UNHAPPINESS AT THE RECENT MASS CELEBRATED AT TENANCINGO BY ARCHBISHOP RIVERA DAMAS IN THE PRESENCE OF ARMED GUERRILLAS (SEPTTEL). HERNANDEZ ASSERTED THAT THE GUERRILLAS WERE TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE ESAF'S COMMITMENT OF TROOPS TO OPERATION FENIX IN THE GUAZAPA AREA BY APPEARING ON TELEVISION AT TENANCINGO, THEREBY SCORING PROPAGANDA POINTS. HE SIMPLY COULD NOT DIVERT TROOPS TO TENANCINGO, HE SAID, ADDING THAT EVEN IF HE COULD, THE MASS WOULD HAVE BEEN ABORTED BY THE ARCHBISHOP AND MORE PROPAGANDA POINTS SCORED AGAINST ARMY "OPPRESSION."

9. FOLLOWING A BRIEF, IMPROMPTU INTERVIEW BETWEEN HERNANDEZ AND TWO U.S. JOURNALISTS (AGAIN UNDERCUTTING YET ANOTHER FMLN LIE THAT THE PRESS IS BEING DENIED ACCESS TO THE AREA), HERNANDEZ DROVE EMBOFFS BACK (IN THE MIDST OF A GUERRILLA TRAVEL BAN) TO SAN SALVADOR ALONG THE NORTHERN TRONCAL. THE PAVED HIGHWAY APPEARED TO BE IN GOOD SHAPE AND TRAFFIC, INCLUDING PACKED BUSES, SEEMED TO BE MOVING NORMALLY. POLOFF NOTICED THAT ABOUT ONE IN THREE OF THE POWER POLES ALONG THE HIGHWAY HAD AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER BEEN DYNAMITED BY THE GUERRILLAS AND REPLACED OR SHORED UP BY THE GOVERNMENT. MANY CONCRETE POSTS WERE RIDDLED WITH SMALL ARMS FIRE. THE TOWNS OF AGUILARES AND GUAZAPA WERE LIVELY AND THE CENTRAL MARKETS SEEMED TO BE THRIVING.

#### 10. COMMENT

ON THE FACE OF IT, THE EVACUATION OF LARGE NUMBERS OF MASAS, PLUS ESAF CAPTURE OF GUERRILLA RIFLES, MEDICAL EQUIPMENT AND DOCUMENTS, OPERATION FENIX IS INFLECTING NO SMALL AMOUNT OF DISCOMFORT ON THE INSURGENTS. THE DEGREE OF DISCOMFORT CAUSED IS EVIDENCED BY THE DELUGE OF PHONE CALLS COMING INTO THE EMBASSY FROM THE U.S. LAST WEEK PROTESTING THE OPERATION (WE HAVE BEEN TOLD BY SEVERAL CALLERS THAT THEY WERE CALLING IN RESPONSE TO INFORMATION PROVIDED THEM BY THE FMLN-SPONSORED "COMMITTEE IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE PEOPLE OF EL <><>SALVADOR--CISPES<><>"). THE PROOF OF THE LONG-TERM VALUE OF OPERATION FENIX WILL BE WHETHER OR NOT ESAF RETAINS, AS IT SAYS IT PLANS TO, A PERMANENT PRESENCE IN THE AREA TO DENY THE GUERRILLAS FURTHER TACTICAL USE OF THE GUAZAPA REDOUBT. IF, AS IN THE PAST, THE TROOPS ARE PULLED BACK TO THE CUARTELS, THE OPERATION WILL HAVE BEEN A WASTE OF MONEY AND MANPOWER. IF, HOWEVER, TROOPS ARE LEFT IN THE AREA, AND CAN DOMINATE GUAZAPA AND KEEP THE AGUILARES-SUCHITOTO ROAD OPEN, OPERATION FENIX WILL HAVE BEEN A MAJOR TACTICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL

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BLOW TO THE FMLN.

11. EMBOFFS WERE IMPRESSED BY THE OBVIOUSLY HIGH MORALE OF THE SOLDIERS, PARTICULARLY IN THE FACE OF A CAMPAIGN THAT HAS SEEN MANY OF THEIR COMRADES FALL TO MINES. IN MANY ARMIES, THE FRUSTRATIONS OF A HIDDEN AND ELUSIVE ENEMY CAUSING DEBILITATING CASUALTIES COULD WELL RESULT IN REPRISALS TAKEN AGAINST CIVILIANS. AT PRESENT THERE HAS BEEN NO EVIDENCE OF SUCH REPRISALS. EVACUATED CIVILIANS WITH WHOM POLOFF SPOKE SEEMED CONTENT, MANY EVEN GRATEFUL AND RELIEVED AT NO LONGER BEING ON GUAZAPA, AND APPRECIATIVE OF THE ARMY'S EFFORTS TO HOUSE AND FEED THEM.

12. BECAUSE HISTORY HAS OFTEN CAST THE SALVADORAN SOLDIER AS A PERPETRATOR OF MASSACRES AND REPRISALS, IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THE CHANGED, MORE PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT OF THE ARMED FORCES DURING OPERATION FENIX, ESPECIALLY WITH RESPECT TO TREATMENT ACCORDED TO CIVILIANS ON GUAZAPA, EVEN THOUGH MOST OF THE LATTER HAVE ACTIVELY AIDED AND ABETTED THE INSURGENCY. THE ESAF RESTRAINT MUST BE ATTRIBUTED TO BETTER TRAINING RECEIVED OVER THE YEARS, IMPROVED LEADERSHIP, AND INSTRUCTIONS TO ADHERE TO HUMAN RIGHTS NORMS. CIVILIAN PERCEPTION OF ESAF TOO HAS CHANGED. EMBOFFS OBSERVED NUMEROUS FRIENDLY EXCHANGES BETWEEN LOCAL CAMPESEINOS AND SOLDIERS, AND WE ARE TOLD THAT MANY OF THE EVACUATED MASAS WERE INITIALLY FOUND AFTER THEY CALLED OUT FOR ARMY HELP FROM THE TATUS AND RAVINES WHERE THEY WERE HIDDEN.

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